

UNITED STATES PERFINS FROM CHINA

Dick Scheper

According to Harvey Bounds in his “United States Postal Agency Shanghai”, China was an important trading destination at the time of the American evolution. Trade was centred around the port of Canton under the control of the British East India Company. In 1784-85 the American ship *Empress of Asia* made the first round trip in the China trade.

After the Opium War of 1840, the British were ceded the island of Hong Kong through the Treaty of Nanking. They treaty also forced the opening of Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai, in addition to Canton, to foreign trade. An American consul was appointed to Amoy in 1844 and American traders became important in the China trade with their clipper ships.

Another provision of the treaty was a concession of 5362 acres to the British in Shanghai. In 1847, the French won by treaty a concession of 356 acres in Shanghai. An American settlement (not really a concession) grew up around the American consulate established in Shanghai in 1847. The American settlement had commercial advantage since it was downstream and beside the first anchorage encountered by arriving vessels. Trade flourished.



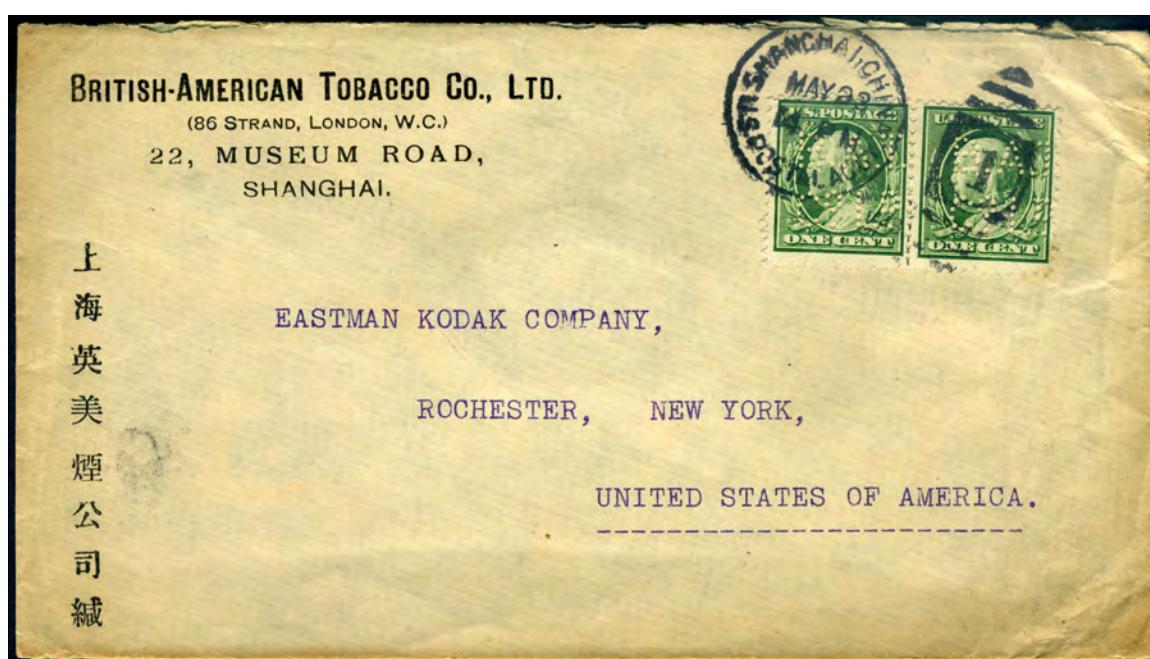
Mail remained under British control with mail from the United States passing through the post office in Hong Kong. Mail was both expensive and unreliable. It was not until 1865 that the United States Post Office was authorized to provide mail service to the Orient. A contract was awarded to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company on August 28, 1865.

The company was to build four steamships to meet Post Office specifications and to be in operation by January 1, 1867. The route was to run from San Francisco to Shanghai via Kanagawa (Yokohama), Japan. Postal agents were appointed in both Kanagawa and Shanghai.

At first U.P.U. rates were applied, but in 1903 United States domestic mail rates were made applicable to mail to or from the postal agency in Shanghai. And while other nations had overprinted their stamps for use in their post offices abroad, it wasn't until 1919 that the United States of America took the same step.

So a long time ordinary US postage stamps were used for mail from Shanghai to America. And very few of these stamps exist with perfins from international companies in Shanghai!

My earliest cover with US stamps with perfins from Shanghai was sent by the British-American Tobacco Company on May 23, 1913.



The cover was addressed to the Eastman Kodak Company in New York. The franking with two 'one cent' stamps was cancelled with a duplex postmark with numeral 1 in bars and a four digit year date.



The perfin is **B.A.T. / Co.Ld.** which is also known on Chinese stamps and in stamps from the British and Russian post offices in Shanghai. In the US perfins catalogue this A-rated perfin got number B 026.5.

The postcard below is franked with a 'one cent' US postage stamp with perfin **T C / & S.** The card was sent through the US Postal Agency in Shanghai on November 11, 1913 and addressed to a Mrs Ida Fallars in Michigan, USA.



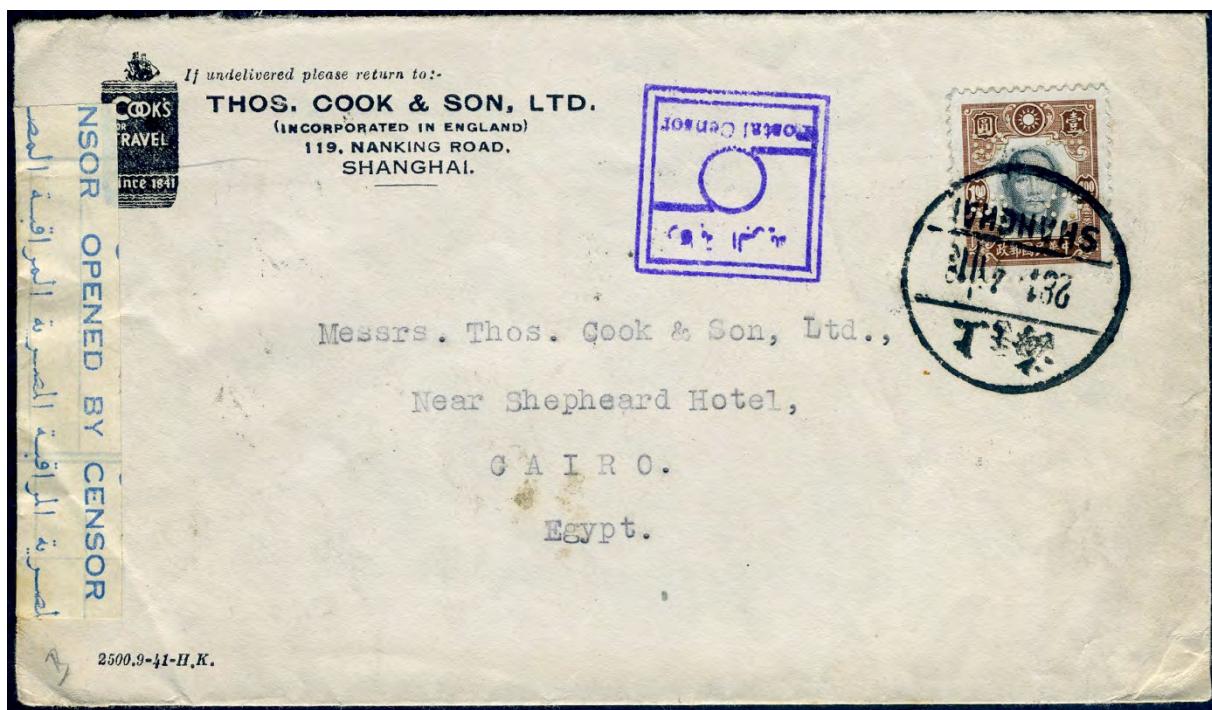
The card was sent by a traveller who no doubt had used the services of the well known travel organisation Thomas Cook & Sons. This company offered its travellers postage stamps with the perforated initials of the company.



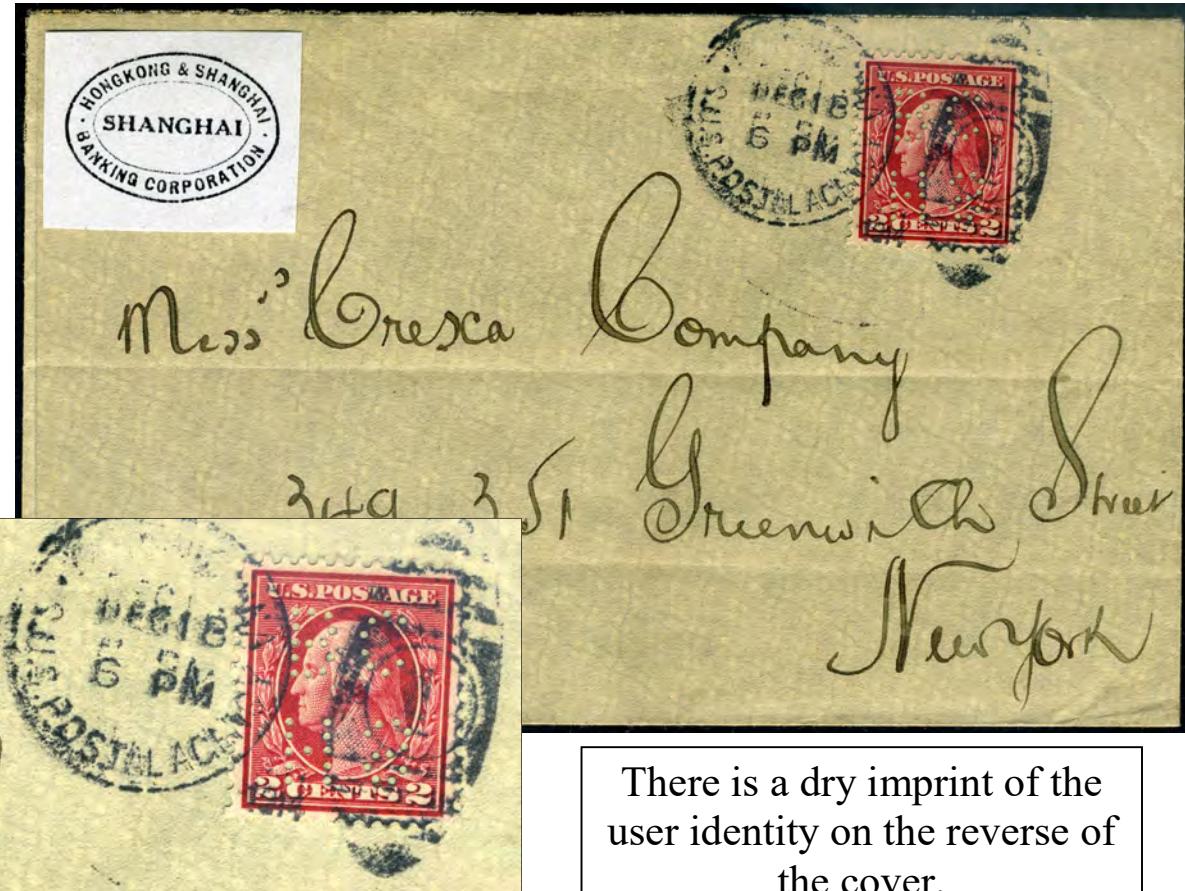
This perfin T C / & S is also known on Chinese stamps and on stamps from the British post office in Shanghai. This perfin is new for the US perfins catalogue. According to Steve Endicott this perfin will get number T 027.5 in the next edition of the catalogue.

Please note that this Shanghai 'T C & S' perfin looks like other Thomas Cook perfins from their branches in the USA and other countries. The main difference is the number of holes in the letter C—8, while most other Thomas Cook perfins have 7 holes in the letter C.

So if you have US stamps with Thomas Cook perfins, you better check your collection and you might find a Shanghai pattern hidden between the others! A Chinese Thomas Cook cover, showing the letter head of the companies branch in Shanghai, is shown below.



Finally I can show a 1914-cover which was sent through the US Postal Agency in Shanghai on December 18, 1914 and addressed to New York, USA.



There is a dry imprint of the user identity on the reverse of the cover.

The perfin on this cover is: 'H S / B C' and the user is the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation in Shanghai.



This Shanghai type of 'H S / B C' perfin pattern is also known on stamps of China and on stamps of the French and Russian post office in Shanghai. In the US perfins catalogue this HS/BC perfin from Shanghai has number H 171.

From the above illustrations we can learn the 'internal' franking rates in those days: 1 cent for a postcard and 2 cents for an ordinary letter. Even if they were sent from far away China!

The U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai was closed on December 31, 1922.